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THE NEW DEAL IN RELIEF

It has been the tradition in the United States to take care of the social wreckage thrown up by the capitalist system through private charity. In the period of "rugged individualism" all proposals for federal relief were attacked as the beginning of an American dole; Hoover said that private charity was "the American way." As unemployment mounted high powered committees, national and local, headed by big business men, were appointed to spur private giving. At the same time there was a steady increase in governmental action in the form of appropriations of municipal, state and federal funds for relief. When Roosevelt took the reins he found an amount of suffering beyond the capacities of existing agencies to relieve.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF

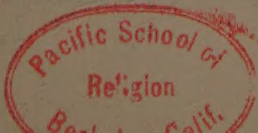
In May, 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was created as the New Deal agency to handle the unprecedented unemployment.

The Job. When Administrator Hopkins took office an estimated 4,000,000 families were receiving relief from public and private funds. Nine months later Hopkins estimated that 3,000,000 families were still on relief, and that figure is widely believed to have been too low. Analyzing the rolls he says that they represent 25 or 30 times as many people as were on relief in 1929 and that these are of "the finest people in America"; most of them have never had to have relief before. Charts released by the FERA show that in September only 6 states had less than 5% of the families on relief. In 24 states the percentage was 5 to 9; in 9 it was 10 to 14; in 5, 15 to 19; and in 4 states over 20%. 10% of all families in the continental U. S. received public relief in that month.

Big Money. For relief funds the administration turned to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. When this was set up in the Hoover administration it appropriated \$300,000,000 in loans to states for relief purposes, to be repaid at 3% interest. (And it appropriated over \$2,000,000,000 in loans to banks, railroads, insurance companies, mortgage loan companies, etc.). Roosevelt's FERA program provided that the RFC should pay out \$500,000,000 for relief upon approval of the administrator. Half of this was to be distributed direct to the states, the remainder to be disbursed on the basis of \$1 for every \$3 of public funds raised for relief within the state. Figures for September show that the federal government was footing about 65% of the total relief bill of the country. The \$500,000,000 fund was supposed to last for two years. It was exhausted by February, 1934, and Congress then appropriated an additional \$950,000,000 for Civil Works (see below) and other relief, to be available until June 30, 1935.

How Much Relief? Public relief in this depression period is practically always on a sub-minimum standard. The following are reports given by representative cities for 1933 as the weekly average for total relief for a family of 5: Baltimore, \$5; Chicago, \$5.76; Detroit, \$3.85; Philadelphia, \$4.46; Pittsburgh, \$3.42; Portland, Ore., \$5.26 (food allowance); St. Paul, \$9.79 (in food orders). A comparison with the "minimum adequate diets" priced by the U. S. Children's Bureau in 1932 shows the inadequacy. Warning that emergency diets are possible only for a limited period because they lower the amounts of various necessary foods, the Bureau indicated that such a minimum diet for a family of 5 could be provided at from \$7.50 to \$10 for food alone. *How would you like to live on this?*

How Administered? Experienced social workers have been called to administer the public relief. But the overwhelming demands on the relief offices make maintenance of accepted standards impossible. "Indefensible food orders" instead



of cash relief is the rule. Social work routine is made more callous and cruel by over-work and shortage of funds. Assistants are often untrained persons given jobs as work relief. How typical is this experience: "My first experience in employ of a political-machine agency. It seems to be the final word in chaos and lack of organization, made more maddening by the continual graft. I can imagine nothing which can kill the spirit of a social worker more quickly. With 250 cases for each worker, it is inevitable that the clients become just 'another nuisance'."

Mass Pressure for Relief. The meagre amount of the relief, its nature and the manner of giving it are not always accepted meekly by applicants. In most large cities and industrial centers fighting unemployed councils and leagues have sprung into existence. There is much testimony as to their effectiveness. The press frequently reports demonstrations before relief stations, administration headquarters, city halls and state capitols, and there have been two national hunger marches lead by the unemployed councils. A united front demonstration of 50,000 unemployed in Chicago in 1932 is credited with the rescinding of an announced 50% relief cut. A recent survey shows 134 successful actions involving 95,000 demonstrators, between March 4 and October 5, many of them led by the councils. Unemployed leagues in Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania have scores of victories to their credit.

Government Acts Again. In October the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation was set up, financed jointly between FERA and AAA to distribute surplus commodities to the unemployed through state agencies. Did the "professors" themselves see the paradox of hunger in the midst of plenty and so devise the scheme? Or had the widespread popular reaction to the paradox registered at Washington? The emphasis was put on helping farm prices. But to do this the commodities had to supplement relief, not be substituted for it. So the hungry benefitted. The powers given FSRC are greater than those of any other emergency arm of the government. Moreover, it is to have "perpetual existence". Yet the public is continually reminded that business is soon to absorb the unemployed. *Why this "perpetual" corporation? Is it another war preparation?*

WORK RELIEF

Public Works. The FERA, as its name shows, was to meet an emergency until recovery got under way. The NIRA itself had set up the PWA to furnish constructive jobs. It was authorized to spend \$3,300,000,000 on public works. But up to January, 1934, only \$405,000,000 had been paid out of that fund and only an estimated 200,000 or 300,000 men had been put to work. The slowness was due in part to the fact that great public projects cannot be undertaken in a hurry. PW administrator Ickes' defense is also that he was determined to avoid graft. A specialized form of public works is the Tennessee Valley project, under the TVA, centering in Muscle Shoals. It has been launched as a great experiment in regional planning and re-distribution of population. *Will the capitalists let piecemeal planning succeed?*

CCC. More directly related to relief is the Civilian Conservation Corps, because the young men taken on are for the most part from families on relief rolls and a large part of the \$30 a month received for their work must be sent to the families. Camps were first opened in April in a two year project. These can care for 300,000 men at a time. These work under direction of U. S. Army officers—at reforestation, land reclamation, pest control, park repairs, etc. A program of replacement has just been announced. Twelve to fifteen months is to be the time limit for any one man so that the work may be spread. *Is the CCC a form of military training?*

Especially CWA. In early November, with winter at hand and over 3,000,000 families on relief, the administration suddenly launched its three month Civil Works plan. This called for transferring \$400,000,000 from the PWA to the FERA, which would itself contribute or find two or three million more. This fund was to be used to get 4,000,000 persons to work at once, 2,000,000 from the relief rolls and 2,000,000 from the unemployed at large. (There were at the time 6 million registered with the U. S. Re-employment Service alone.) There was to be no investigation—applicants were not to be considered charity cases. Wages were to be enough to "assure a decent standard of living," i.e., 40c and 50c minimum per hour for a 30-hour week, and a minimum of \$1.20 an hour for skilled labor. Where the wage normally paid for a certain kind of work in the community was higher, that wage must be paid for CWA work.

CWA in Action. The new plan took hold. States quickly got projects under way. By December 15 over 4,000,000 persons were reported at work. Much of this work was done in public view—gangs of men repaired roads and buildings, cleared land, set out trees. Less conspicuous work was done by professional and technical people in libraries, schools, offices, etc. To some extent the latter types of work, and also educational and artistic projects, were carried on under the related program known as Civil Works Service. CWS was paid for by federal relief instead of public work funds and applicants must establish "need."

Liquidating CWA. Before the three months were up CWA was extended to May 1st. The money dwindled and CWA was hard put to it to make the first installment last to mid-February. The minimum wage tended to become a maximum; the work week was slashed from 30 to 24 hours, and in rural areas to 15 hours. In some sections the staggering of work went to extremes. The no-investigation order was rescinded. Much graft was reported. Employers discharged workers and got free CWA help. Some employed persons left their jobs and applied to CWA. Workers made complaints and threats—they did not enjoy made work. Especially, employers were hostile from the first because the minimum wage scales set up were often more than they were paying. The administration refused to consider extension of CWA beyond May 1st and systematic lay-offs from the new found jobs were begun in mid-February. The President said that public works and natural recovery would absorb those laid off. There was consternation among unemployed and relief workers. Protests poured into Washington: projects would be left unfinished; especially thousands of workers would be added to the greatly over-burdened relief rolls.

Now Another Plan. On February 28th the President announced a new plan. He now divided the unemployed into three groups: distressed rural families who must have a chance at self support; "stranded populations" who should be transplanted, (he is interested in "subsistence homesteads") and unemployed in cities who may "reasonably look forward to regular jobs" and are entitled to relief in the meantime. A few days later Hopkins said that on March 30th (instead of May 1st) CW employees in cities would be dropped from CWA and taken over on April 1st by work divisions of state and local relief administrations. The demobilization already started would be continued during four weeks. Under the new plan only those who can show need are to be employed and only one person in a family. Wages will be at the local prevailing rate but not less than 30c an hour. There will be a 24 hour week. Workers will no longer be federal employees and thus will not be entitled to federal accident or death insurance. State and city officials and relief administrators are struggling to carry out the new orders. *What is "need"? Do you need your job? Could your family get along with one earner making \$7.20 a week?*

Are we in for a long time project? Why is it needed if business can absorb the unemployed? Shall we have more improvisation? Or scientific analysis? Is the workers' demand for unemployment insurance sound? Does insurance mean a recognition of a permanent army of unemployed? Would it serve as in England to head off revolution? Why not get rid of unemployment?

In the meantime there must be relief and more relief by taxation of large incomes and by a capital levy if necessary. And why not spend for relief instead of for war?

Rising Protests. In the meantime the workers take a hand. Contacts are close between CWA and the unemployed, who get the meagre CWA jobs and lose them again. CWA workers earlier demanded tools, protective clothing, heated shacks, etc. All winter there have been strikes and threats of strikes. Now there are huge angry mass meetings, marches, demonstrations before CWA offices. Professional and technical workers are joining. In New York there is bitter agitation against the new "paupers oath questionnaire". Relief officers are increasingly uneasy as April 1st with the ending of CWA approaches.

PRIVATE RELIEF

Welfare Agencies. The depression has added to the burdens of all private relief and family welfare agencies. Russell Sage Foundation data on the operations of 62 family case work organizations and departments in the first two years of the depression show that the load of relief cases doubled or tripled in a few as early as December, 1929; by December, 1930, a number were carrying 4, 5, even 6 times the former load; during 1931 many went on doubling the load over and over. Also the nature of their work has changed. While social workers who went over to public relief jobs were forced to throw overboard hard won standards of social work, the private agencies struggled to keep hold of their principles. But overnight family agencies with carefully developed casework methods became relief agencies with long waiting lines. Charity societies that had worked out fairly adequate relief budgets had to cut them mercilessly. Social workers are suffering guilty consciences for the violation of elementary standards of courtesy and kindness.

Not on the Record. There is a vast amount of unreported relief. Local labor unions help their idle (A. F. of L. unions that reported in 1932 showed a total of nearly \$20,000,000 in unemployment insurance alone, not counting other benefits). Churches quietly help parishioners; teachers help pupils; musicians give benefits for their fellows and artists furnish regular meals to fellow artists; storekeepers continue to extend credit long after hope of payment has gone; friends "lend" money to friends and do not expect it back. A poll of anybody's acquaintances shows some who formerly gave away clothes to "the poor" now wearing hand-me-downs.

What is happening to morale? The ghost of pauperization has haunted social workers. Is the feeling of dependency going? What does this mean? Can people take old clothes as a matter of course from friends? Do they take relief from the public with any different feeling?

If instead of dependency the feeling comes of "getting theirs," where has initiative gone? Cf. farmers and millionaires. If all are getting at the end of the receiving line, as parasites, what kind of a nation will this be?

Unemployed Self Help. In the middle of the depression period, tens of thousands of manual and white collar workers across the country enrolled in self help organizations by way of keeping off the charity rolls. They provided goods and services for each other and worked out various forms of barter and exchange, including sometimes media of exchange. The programs have proved unworkable in a machine society and the self help organizations have tended to become fighting unemployed leagues and councils. (See above.)

SOCIAL WRECKAGE

In the meantime the toll of human wreckage mounts.

Broken Homes. From a few of many reports: In Cincinnati, a typical city, there were 1,100 court evictions in 1930, 1250 in 1931, 3100 in 1932. Chicago's actual evictions numbered 1351 for the six months from December, 1931, to May, inclusive, and increased to 2260 for the following six months. There were 26,515 children in the families evicted. The Philadelphia Housing Association reported in May, 1933, that more than 28,000 families had to double up with friends or relatives. Part of the same tale is the reported increase of 134% between 1928 and 1932 in the number of men arraigned in New York City for abandoning their families and the increase in the number of children put into institutions.

Broken Health. Of 11,000 individuals studied in the three industrial cities, Birmingham, Detroit and Pittsburg, by the Milbank Memorial Fund and the U. S. Public Health Service in 1933 the rate of disabling illness in families of the unemployed was 39% higher than in families of full time wage earners and 25% higher than that in families of part-time workers. The highest rate of all was in families that had fallen from "reasonably comfortable circumstances" in 1929 to poverty in 1932. It was 60% higher than in families that had suffered no drop in income.

The Children. The U. S. Children's Bureau in a study of effects of the depression on the nutrition of children gives percentages in undernourishment and underweight which seem to justify the conclusion that about one-fourth of our children are suffering in this way. A Milbank Memorial study of 514 school children in the Bellevue district of Manhattan shows that 4 out of 10 of the poorest children were suffering from serious undernourishment and that 25% of the children in workers' families having somewhat higher incomes were rated as "poor" and "very poor" in nutrition.

Mental Health. The Neurological Hospital, New York City, reports that a new peak has been reached in cases of mental illnesses resulting from a sense of insecurity. Such cases have developed frequently since the beginning of the second year of the depression, with a marked increase in recent months. Dr. Pratt of the institute speaks of the increase of patients of the "shattered morale type." Other reports are to the same effect.

Food and Health. In the east side district of New York City families on relief were found by the Milbank study to have a diet of 10% below the minimum standard required for energy value and those on work relief a diet of 20% below. As the income declined the average consumption of each type of food in the dietary was reduced, the greatest reduction being in the use of milk, meat, fish, eggs, vegetables and fruit. A committee headed by Graham Taylor in 1932 and 1933 saw men, women and children gathering and eating food from the garbage dumps. Little out of the way press items now and again report deaths by starvation, such as, "The magistrate ordered the starving man taken to a hospital but he died on the way."

What is happening to the nation's vitality?

Sources. Forthcoming edition of Labor Fact Book, by Labor Research Association; current daily and labor press; social workers' magazines, especially the *Survey*.

Correction. The L. R. A. estimate of unemployment for 1933 is 15,845,000. The figure quoted in the February issue of the BULLETIN, 16,884,000, was the L. R. A. estimate for 1932.

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